

AMENDMENTS**In the Claims**

The following is a marked-up version of the claims with the language that is underlined ("____") being added and the language that contains strikethrough ("—") being deleted:

1. (Currently Amended) A communication method comprising:
receiving an instant messaging (IM) message from a sender to a first recipient;
waiting a predefined time interval for an input from the first recipient, the input being responsive to the IM message;
determining whether input from the first recipient is received during the predetermined time interval; ~~and~~
in response to determining that no input from the first recipient is received during the predetermined time interval, prompting the sender to forward the instant message from the first recipient to a second recipient and indicate, by the first recipient, that the IM message originated from the ~~sender~~; sender,
wherein in response to a determination that the recipient is engaged in an IM session with an earlier sender, the sender is queried to join the IM session, and wherein in response determining that the sender desires to join the IM session, the second sender is queried to determine whether to allow the sender to join the IM session.

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising replying to the IM message, wherein replying to the IM message comprises:
providing a message indicating the first recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising replying to the IM message, wherein replying to the IM message comprises:

providing a message requesting the sender to wait for a predetermined time period.

4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising replying to the IM message, wherein replying to the IM message comprises:

periodically providing messages, the messages being periodically provided at predefined time intervals, each message indicating the first recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session during the corresponding predefined time interval.

5. (Previously Presented) A communication method comprising:
receiving an instant messaging (IM) message from a first sender to a recipient;
determining whether input from the first recipient is received during a predetermined time interval;

in response to determining that no input is received during the predetermined time interval determining whether the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with a second sender; and

in response to determining that the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with the second sender, prompting the sender to forward the instant message from the first recipient to a second recipient and indicating, by the first recipient, that the IM message originated from the sender.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 5, further comprising: waiting a predefined time interval prior to replying to the IM message.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 5, further comprising:

indicating to the first sender that the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with the second sender.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 5, further comprising: periodically providing messages to the first sender, the messages being periodically provided at predefined time intervals, each message indicating the first recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session during the corresponding predefined time interval.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 5, further comprising:

indicating to the first sender that the first recipient is unavailable to engage in an IM chat session with the first sender.

10. (Previously Presented) A computer-readable medium encoded with a computer program such that when executed by a computer performs at least the following:

receive an instant messaging (IM) message from a sender to a first recipient;
wait a predefined time interval for an input from the first recipient, the input being responsive to the IM message;
determine whether input from the first recipient is received during the predetermined time interval; and

in response to determining that no input from the first recipient is received during the predetermined time interval, prompt the sender to forward the instant message from the first recipient to a second recipient and indicating, by the first recipient, that the IM message originated from the sender.

11. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable medium of claim 10, further configured to perform at least the following:

provide a message indicating the first recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session.

12. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable medium of claim 10, further configured to perform at least the following:

provide a message requesting the sender to wait for a predetermined time period.

13. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable medium of claim 10, further configured to perform at least the following:

periodically provide messages, the messages being periodically provided at predefined time intervals, each message indicating the first recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session during the corresponding predefined time interval.

14. (Previously Presented) A computer-readable medium encoded with a computer program such that when executed by a computer performs at least the following:

receive an instant messaging (IM) message from a first sender to a first recipient;

determine whether input from the first recipient is received during a predetermined time interval;

in response to determining that no input is received during the predetermined time interval, determine whether the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with second sender; and

in response to determining that the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with the second sender prompt the sender to forward the instant message from the first recipient to a second recipient and indicating, by the first recipient, that the IM message originated from the sender.

15. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable medium of claim 14, further configured to perform at least the following:

wait a predefined time interval prior to replying to the IM message.

16. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable medium of claim 14, further configured to perform at least the following:

indicate that the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with the second sender.

17. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable medium of claim 14, further configured to perform at least the following:

periodically provide messages to the first sender, the messages being periodically provided at predefined time intervals, each message indicating the first recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session during the corresponding predefined time interval.

18. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable medium of claim 14, further configured to perform at least the following:

indicate that the first recipient is unavailable to engage in an IM chat session with the first sender.

19. (Previously Presented) A communication system comprising:

means for receiving an instant messaging (IM) message from a sender to a first recipient;

means for determining whether the first recipient has provided an input during a predefined time interval;

means for, in response to determining that the first recipient has not provided an input during the predetermined time interval, determining whether the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with another sender;

means for, in response to determining that the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with another sender, replying to the IM message; and

means for, in response to determining that the first recipient is not engaged in an IM chat session with another user, prompting the sender to forward the instant message from the first recipient to a second recipient and indicate, by the first recipient, that the IM message originated from the sender,

wherein all the means are embodied as hardware controlled by software.

20. (Previously Presented) A communication system comprising:

a memory component that stores:

instant-messaging (IM) receive logic configured to receive an IM message from a sender to a first recipient;

first determining logic configured to determine whether the first recipient has provided an input during a predefined time interval;

second determining logic configured to, in response to determining that the first recipient has not provided an input during the predetermined time interval, determine whether the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with another sender;

reply logic configured to, in response to determining that the first recipient is engaged in an IM chat session with another sender, reply to the IM message; and

prompting logic configured to, in response to determining that the first recipient is not engaged in an IM chat session with another sender, prompt the sender to forward the instant message from the first recipient to a second recipient and indicating, by the first recipient, that the IM message originated from the sender.

21. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 20, wherein the determining logic comprises a timer configured to track elapsed time from a receiving of an IM message the reply logic comprises message-generation logic configured to generate a message, the message being indicative of the first recipient's unavailability to engage in an IM chat session.

22. (Canceled)

23. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 20, further comprising a processor configured to execute logic stored in the memory component.